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RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 1117
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DEPT FOR PRM/AFR M. LANGE
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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [ZI](#) [SF](#)
SUBJECT: IOM RECEPTION CENTER PROVIDES MUCH NEEDED RELIEF

Summary

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1. (U) Poloffs from Embassies Harare and Pretoria met on January 30 in the town of Beitbridge, Zimbabwe to tour the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Reception Center for Zimbabweans deported from South Africa. Since opening its doors, the IOM Center has provided much needed relief to deportees as well as the overburdened local police and health and social service providers. Zimbabwean immigration officials use a building at the IOM Center to process all deportees returning from South Africa. After in-take by Zimbabwean immigration, approximately 50 percent of deportees use IOM's services, including food assistance, medical and psycho/social attention and transport home. The IOM Center does not provide shelter to adults but does for unaccompanied children.

2. (U) IOM estimates that South African authorities deport over 300 Zimbabweans every day and deportations are on the rise. Many of the deportees report they are subject to abuse by South African police and border officials. IOM's future plans for Zimbabwe and South Africa include implementing a formal registration system at the IOM Center, collaborating on a guest worker program with the Zimbabwean and South African Governments and opening additional facilities along the Zimbabwean border with South Africa and Botswana. End Summary.

The Center Provides Much Needed Services

¶3. (U) Nick Van Der Vyver, director of the IOM Reception and Support Center, gave a tour of the facilities to poloffs on January 30. Funded by the U.K. and Sweden, the IOM Center located in Beitbridge, Zimbabwe on the border with South Africa, opened in May 2006 to receive Zimbabweans deported from South Africa. The IOM Center with a staff of nearly 40 is open 7 days a week - 365 days a year. Save the Children Foundation Norway (SCFN), in cooperation with the Zimbabwean Government Ministry for Social Welfare, began providing services to unaccompanied children at the IOM Center in July 2006. IOM also provides Zimbabwean immigration authorities a building that is segregated from the rest of the reception center to process all returning deportees. After in-take by Zimbabwean immigration, approximately 50 percent of deportees use IOM's services, including food assistance, medical and psycho/social attention and transport home.

¶4. (U) The IOM Center does not provide shelter to adults, except in rare cases. Adult deportees choose either to be released into the Beitbridge area or accept transport home the same day. The IOM Center also has segregated facilities to provide shelter for up to 40 unaccompanied children at a time. From July to December 2006, over 1,000 unaccompanied minors received assistance from the children's services unit at the IOM Center. The children usually stay for a few days as case workers from the GOZ Ministry of Social Welfare arrange for placement with families or in an orphanage.

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¶5. (U) Before the IOM Center opened, South African Government (SAG) authorities dropped off the deportees at the local Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) station where they were quickly released into the Beitbridge area. According to Van Der Vyver, local government officials blamed the resulting large transient population for the rising level of crime in Beitbridge, including an increase in prostitution, sexual assaults and petty crime. The transient population also reportedly placed a large burden on the already strained local health and social services in the area. Van Der Vyver reported that local government officials have been pleased with the much needed relief IOM has provided.

Deportations on the Rise

¶6. (U) According to GOZ data, SAG authorities deported 109,532 Zimbabweans in 2006--more than double the 49,788 deported in 2005. Van Der Vyver told us that in the past few months 300 to 400 Zimbabweans have been deported from South Africa every day. Van Der Vyver believed the increase in deportations was likely explained by stepped-up SAG enforcement in response to the massive influx of Zimbabweans heading to South Africa to escape the worsening economic situation at home.

¶7. (U) According to Van Der Vyver, the vast majority of the deportees were young males 18 to 24 years old from the southern provinces of Zimbabwe--especially Masvingo, Matebeleland South, and Bulawayo. An estimated two-thirds of deportees tried to cross illegally back to South Africa again. (Note: Neither the GOZ nor the IOM Center currently has a system to register and track deportees. End Note.)

¶8. (U) Additionally, Van Der Vyver said illegal crossings and deportations would likely continue to rise in 2007 because the GOZ has stopped issuing passports except in special cases, which makes it difficult for the average Zimbabwean to acquire necessary documentation for legal travel. On February 21, the government-controlled daily The Herald

reported that the Registrar General's Office had a backlog of 300,000 applications for passports and did not have funding to purchase the special paper and ink required to produce them.

The Process

¶9. (U) Van Der Vyver explained that RSA authorities rounded up most undocumented Zimbabweans during raids on farms and factories rather than in the act of illegally crossing the border. An estimated 80 percent of the deportees were caught in the Limpopo Valley, a vast agricultural and mining area in northern South Africa.

¶10. (U) On the day of our visit, we saw SAG buses off-load close to 500 Zimbabweans in the late afternoon. The deportees queued up and filed steadily through a building for a quick interview by Zimbabwean immigration officials. Van Der Vyver explained that the line usually only stopped when there was a doubt about the individual's Zimbabwean

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citizenship. (Note: The deportees have included in the past Mozambican, Congolese and even Somali migrants. End Note.) The deportees then gathered in a shaded area where IOM representatives provided information about the importance of safe and legal migration and reviewed the other IOM services offered.

¶11. (U) After hearing the IOM pitch, the deportees were free to leave or make use of the IOM services. Several of the deportees' polioffs interviewed said they would accept the hot meal and transport home, but would likely cross again in a few weeks to look for work. Most blamed President Mugabe for Zimbabwe's problems and were just "waiting for the Old Man to die."

Migrants Vulnerable to Abuse

¶12. (U) According to Van Der Vyver, many women and children fell victim to criminals and corrupt officials along the border. Although less than five percent of the deportees reported abuse, IOM believes abuse rates were likely much higher given victims typically do not report abuse as a result of cultural sensitivities and the belief authorities will not act. A significant number of Zimbabwean parents live in South Africa and want their children to join them there, leading the parents to hire smugglers to bring their children illegally across this border. With large-scale child smuggling, children become easy targets for deception, prostitution, theft, rape and corruption while in transit.

¶13. (SBU) Van Der Vyver told us that SAG authorities also contributed to the abuse of migrants as police and immigration officials sometimes confiscated documents from Zimbabweans legally in South Africa and then deported them. Additionally, Van Der Vyver said that IOM had received reports of SAG officials sometimes physically abusing deportees and denying them medical attention. Van Der Vyver said that even if a victim filed a complaint, it was difficult to get any officer charged, much less convicted.

Future Plans

¶14. (U) Due to the increasing number of deportations and the associated crimes and abuse against migrants, IOM's future plans for Zimbabwe and South Africa included implementing a formal registration and tracking system at the IOM Center, collaborating with the SAG and GOZ on a guest worker program and opening additional IOM facilities along the border

(specifically in Messina, South Africa across the border from Beitbridge and in Plumtree, on the Zimbabwe side of the border with Botswana). The IOM Center also hoped to bolster its protection staff and to improve its outreach on health and safe migration campaigns. Van Der Vyver said these plans definitely had the support of GOZ authorities; however, "everything always moves slowly with the government" and funding remained a challenge.

Comment

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¶15. (SBU) The IOM Center in Beitbridge is little more than a band-aid on a gaping wound. Most of the Zimbabwean deportees will again cross illegally into South Africa, many the same day. The IOM Center, however, provides important relief and protection for a vulnerable population. IOM's work with children and women is particularly valuable and worthy of support. The reality is that the flow of illegal migrants from Zimbabwe to South Africa will continue to accelerate until the economic and political situation in Zimbabwe improves. End Comment.

¶16. (U) This cable was cleared by Embassy Pretoria.
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